

How We Change the Black East Side

A neighborhood planning and development framework

A Report to the Buffalo Center for Health Equity



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Abstract

The Harder We Run report indicated that Black Buffalo had not progressed in 30 years. This paper outlines a **bold vision** and a **strategic approach** to show how we can change the Black East Side into a great place to live, work, play, and raise a family.

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PROLOGUE

Following the release of **The Harder We Run** in September 2021, the City of Buffalo and its private sector partners pursued a process of East Side neighborhood “development” that ignored comprehensive planning and **root causes**. Their strategy focused on implementing an assortment of piecemeal projects to make profits rather than transform the East Side into a great place to live, work, play, and raise a family.

The City’s profit-making approach to neighborhood “development” will not **change** the Black East Side. More importantly, it threatens the community’s long-term sustainability by unleashing the menace of gentrification. The data shows that gentrification threatens Black neighborhoods along the Main Street corridor, downtown Buffalo, and those communities near big anchor institutions, such as the University at Buffalo South Campus and Canisius College.

In this context, the Buffalo Center for Health Equity asked the UB Center for Urban Studies to construct a conceptual framework to guide the development of a **neighborhood demonstration project**. The purpose is to create a pilot project in a **single neighborhood** to show how to transform the East Side into a great community. In the summer of 2023, drafts of the demonstration project concept paper were sent to over twenty-five Buffalo scholars, activists, community residents, and stakeholders. I received more than twenty commentaries on the draft, including several very detailed critiques.

In particular, several insightful conversations occurred between me and a highly insightful public scholar and bureaucrat who goes by the pseudonym **Unknown Warrior**. The Warrior’s contributions were significant, but many others also played a critical role in developing *How We Change the Black East Side*, including colleagues from Back to Basics, representatives from the local religious community, the King Urban Life Center, the UB Center for Urban Studies, UB Department of Urban and Regional Studies, the Community Health Equity Research Institute, the African American Health Equity Task Force, the UB Law School, and the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

The contributions of Pastor George Nicholas of Lincoln Memorial United Methodist Church and the Buffalo Center for Health Equity, Dr. Timothy Murphy, Senior Associate Dean for Clinical and Translational Research and director of the UB Community Health Equity Research Institute, Dr. Heather R. Abraham, Associate Professor of Law and The Director of the U.B. Civil Rights and Transparency Clinic, and Dr. Robert M. Silverman, Full Professor in the UB Department of Urban and Regional Planning, and a Senior Research Fellow at the UB Center for Urban Studies were particularly helpful in fleshing out the ideas contained in this report. Lastly, Beth Kwiatek, a Senior Research Fellow at the UB Center for Urban Studies, played a significant role in developing this report. She edited the text and helped clarify and enrich many of the ideas in this report.

The larger and more significant point is this report is the product of the thinking and insights of many people, not just the author. It reflects the **collective approach** to knowledge production used by the Center for Urban Studies. Establishing a neighborhood demonstration project is the next step in transforming Buffalo’s East Side into a **neighborly community**. The time has come to obtain the resources necessary to realize the neighborhood demonstration project in practice.

INTRODUCTION

The neighborly community is the prize we seek.

It is why we struggle and fight.

So, keep your eyes on the prize

Keep hope alive

Don't quit.

Fight on. Fight on.¹

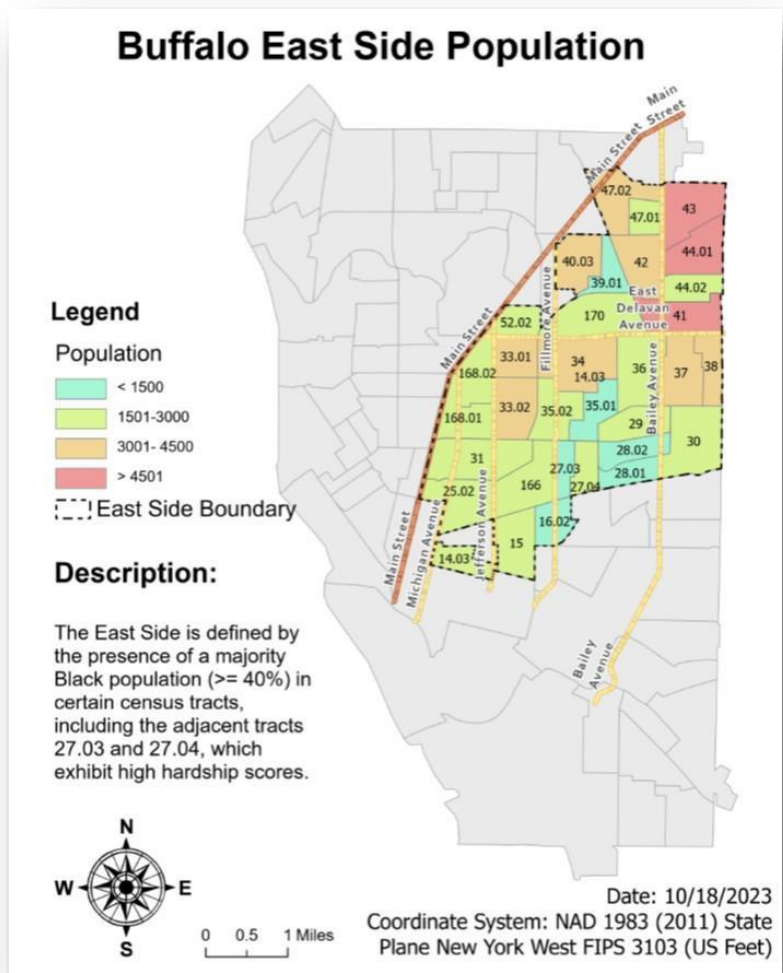
The Harder We Run report indicated that Black Buffalo **has not progressed** over the past thirty years because of the interplay among racism, socioeconomic forces, and the city-building policies of long-serving mayors James D. Griffin, Anthony Masiello, and Byron Brown. The racialized socioeconomic and city-building forces unleashed by these three mayors not only underdeveloped Black neighborhoods but also produced adverse social determinants that spawned undesirable health outcomes among the residents. The underdeveloped Black neighborhood **stands at the core** of the East Side's challenges. Therefore, you cannot abolish race-based health inequities without creating a neighborhood development strategy that **challenges** these racist socioeconomic and city-building practices and transforms the Black East Side into a great place to live for the actually existing population.

Why do neighborhoods matter? The extensive neighborhood effects literature indicates that an interactive relationship exists between people and place. People act on place, and place acts on people. In this setting, people's life chances and health outcomes positively correlate with their neighborhoods. Consequently, individuals in underdeveloped neighborhoods have life experiences and health outcomes that fundamentally differ from those living in developed neighborhoods. Neighborhoods thus socially reproduce the class and socioeconomic positionality of people in the urban metropolis, thereby recreating **the racial hierarchy as a neighborhood hierarchy**. Structurally, in this scenario, the role of underdeveloped Black neighborhoods is to **produce workers who are willing to accept low-wage jobs** with limited benefits and few, if any, possibilities for advancement.

¹ This statement is a paraphrase from *Keep Your Eyes on the Prize* song by Pete Seeger. Versions of the song were made by other artists, including Mahalia Jackson, Bob Dylan, and Bruce Springsteen. *Keep Your Eyes on the Prize* became an anthem for the Civil Rights Movement.

Consequently, unless we **build another, very different, and better neighborhood**, health inequities and underdeveloped Black neighborhoods will persist as if immutable and fixed in time and space. This report proposes a **strategy** to produce a **new, alternate neighborhood development model** capable of transforming the Black East Side into a great place to live, work, play, and raise a family for the **existing population**. We call this alt-model the **neighborly community**, a place residents can call their home.

The Black East Side is a complex community with thousands of residents and over thirty neighborhoods, using the US Census Tract as a neighborhood surrogate. Given its size and complexity, we propose establishing a demonstration project in **a single neighborhood** to determine if our comprehensive planning and development approach can transform the East Side into a neighborly community.



Source: UB Center for Urban Studies

The alt-model of neighborhood development can **challenge** structural racism, anti-Black socioeconomic forces, and profit-centered city-building practices while simultaneously attacking the root causes of Black neighborhood underdevelopment and undesirable health outcomes.

In **the Harder We Run**, we identified seven **root causes** of Black underdevelopment and undesirable health outcomes: racial residential segregation, underdevelopment of East Side neighborhoods, limited educational attainment, structural joblessness, low wages, gentrification, and food insecurity and limited access to health care services. In **How We Change the Black East Side**, we created **seven targeted focus areas** that correlate with the seven root causes of Black underdevelopment and adverse health outcomes. Solving the problems associated with each focus area will trigger the transformation of the Black East Side into a neighborly community with safe streets, quality uncostly housing, excellent schools, and a vibrant green infrastructure. In these robust neighborhoods, the households will be financially self-sufficient and experience physical, mental, and social wellbeing. Once successfully developed, the alt-model will be applied to **other** Buffalo and Erie County neighborhoods. In the interim, other East Side neighborhoods can use the **neighborly community framework** to attack underdevelopment in their communities.

I want to stress that the **neighborly community** is an alternative neighborhood model rather than a duplication or replication of the traditional **White middle-class model of neighborhood development**. The origin of the White neighborhood model dates back to the late 19th and 20th centuries when large development companies experimented with racial segregation in planning and developing suburban communities to maximize profits. During the Great Depression real estate appraisers formulated a racist land valorization system to guide the development of the amortized mortgage that is still used. The goal was to create a neighborhood and housing commodification system to stimulate mass homeownership and jumpstart the economy. This strategy interlocked real estate and financial markets and transformed homeownership into a tool of wealth production. However, to make it happen, the financial system needed a method to determine the future value of a house.

In 1932, the real estate appraiser Frederick Babcock and others developed a land value system based on the theory that **Blacks** and other low-income groups triggered **neighborhood decline** and **falling property values** when they moved into communities dominated by homeowners. So, they should be excluded from these residential areas. In this land valorization system, housing values increased as the share of the White population and income exclusivity (class) increased. Likewise, housing values decreased as the

Black share of the population and income inclusivity (class) increased.

This racist approach to land valorization and homeownership produced the traditional White neighborhood model in the years following World War II when the mass homeownership movement was launched. Thus, the traditional neighborhood model was based on the **commodification** of shelter, homeownership as a **wealth-producing tool**, increasing property values, and race and class **exclusion**. Decades later, America's **most valuable residential properties** are still the Whitest and most racially and class-exclusive neighborhoods. **Homeownership** and **exclusivity** are interlocked in today's real estate industry. For example, in 2019, Clarence had the highest median-valued housing and median household income in Erie County, and only one percent of its population was Black. Conversely, Buffalo City had the lowest median-valued housing and median household income in Erie County, and 37% of its population was Black. So, in Erie County, the most valuable housing is found in the Whitest and most exclusive neighborhoods in Erie County.

The White neighborhood model breeds exclusivity. Therefore, **you cannot use it** to transform the Black East Side. You can try, but you will fail. Therefore, this initiative will use the **alt-model of neighborhood development** to turn the Black East Side into a great place to live. The alt-model is based on the principle of inclusivity and aims to build a high-quality community with uncultured housing for all residents. **Collective ownership** is centered, while individual homeownership is decentered. The aim is to de-commodify housing and keep inexpensive by suppressing property values and regulating market dynamics. Individual homeownership and wealth production is supported, but they do not drive neighborhood development.

THE STRATEGY

This project bases the transformation of the Black East Side into a neighborly community on the principle of **targeted universalism**. This approach to neighborhood development aims to achieve universal outcomes by implementing targeted and specific strategies for different neighborhood groups. It recognizes that not all individuals or groups start from the same baseline, and to achieve equitable outcomes, interventions need to be tailored to address the unique challenges residents face. This perspective poses the question, "What do we mean by a neighborhood?"

A neighborhood is a spatially bounded residential area with well-defined geographic boundaries. It is characterized by **a sense of "community" and belonging** among its residents and some levels of social organization and shared spaces, including block clubs, community-based organizations, parks,

schools, businesses, and the like. The “community” concept has both a geographical and social meaning. Geographically, “community” refers to a collection of contiguous neighborhoods with a shared history and destiny. Socially, “community” refers to a group with a shared identity, a common destiny, and a general sense of purpose and goals with people connected by a network of formal and informal social groups.

The **Black East Side** community consists of a network of neighborhoods where Blacks **comprise 40%** or more of the population. We delineate the neighborhood’s geographic boundaries as a federal census tract or a group of census tracts. The City uses a similar approach in defining its official neighborhoods. For example, census tract 31 forms the boundaries of the Fruit Belt. In other instances, the city will aggregate several census tracts into one neighborhood. So, the Broadway-Fillmore community consists of census tracts 166, 28, and 16. Scholars and policymakers prefer this approach to establishing neighborhood boundaries because it facilitates data gathering and analysis.

TARGETED FOCUS AREAS

The UB Center for Urban Studies identified **seven targeted focus areas** that correlate with the *root causes* of neighborhood underdevelopment and health inequity on Buffalo’s East Side. The development of these focus areas will trigger the East Side’s radical transformation. The identification of these seven focus areas is based on the **Harder We Run** report, studies of Black Buffalo, focus groups held with residents following the Blizzard 2022, informal conversations with Black leaders and policymakers, and others concerned about the plight of Black Buffalo.

The seven focus areas are (1) community control of the neighborhood, (2) fixing the actual existing rental housing, (3) universal housing, property ownership, and community wealth building, (4) universal education and skills training, (5) youth development, (6) bolstering the neighborhood’s visual image, and (7) abolishing neighborhood health inequities.

This section outlines the challenges *and* aspirations found in each focus area. During the neighborhood planning phase, a **roadmap** consisting of solutions, proposals, and recommendations will be created to guide the community’s movement from the neighborhood’s focus area challenge to realizing its aspiration. This **roadmap**, it should be emphasized, must be developed by a comprehensive planning process led by residents in partnership with progressive planners and focus area specialists. Most importantly, these seven focus areas are interconnected and must be **collectively planned** during the comprehensive neighborhood planning stage of community development.

Seven target focus areas



Source: UB Center for Urban Studies

1. Community Control of the Neighborhood

Blacks do not control any aspects of the growth and development of their neighborhood, leaving them vulnerable to everything from natural disasters to persistent underdevelopment to gentrification. In this setting, landlords can rent substandard housing at exorbitant prices, vacant lots can be left unkept, and developers can build whatever they want as long as the City approves it. Residents have little or no say in what happens inside their community. This undemocratic approach to neighborhood development must be changed. Communities must be **highly organized** to create democratic, equity-centered approaches to neighborhood development.

The goal is to use **neighborhood governance and community land trusts** to control East Side neighborhood development. We have two aims. The first is establishing a democratically elected neighborhood council, or some other governance system, to oversee and guide the community's growth and development. The council should consist of appointed and elected members. The appointed members should be Block Club members, representatives from community-based organizations, neighborhood businesses, and residents. In this governance structure, the neighborhood residents will comprise 70% of the neighborhood council members.

The second aim is to establish a **community land trust** (CLT) to acquire ownership and control over the physical neighborhood by obtaining residential, commercial, vacant, and abandoned properties for the community's benefit. The CLT is a democratically run non-profit that acquires and places land under

the community's control. The goal is to establish a publicly financed CTL to create greater stability and capacity to hire more experienced and professional staff.

2. Fix the actual existing Rental Housing

The **rental housing problem** and **rent gouging** are two top problems facing Black Buffalo. It is the root cause of many other East Side socioeconomic issues, including race-based health disparities. The **commodification of housing** is the culprit. The acceleration of the commodification of housing has led to unprecedented levels of housing insecurity in the United States, characterized by substandard rental housing, rent gouging, and homelessness. This out-of-control commodification process is driven by the promotion of individual homeownership, disinvestment in public and subsidized housing, gentrification, and the rise in real estate speculation sparked by the gentrification movement. As the scholar and activist Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor has noted, "As long as there is a price on shelter, it will be inaccessible to millions of people."

The rental housing problem is characterized by **substandard housing** and **rent gouging**. Almost two-thirds of Black Buffalo households are renters, with most living in substandard dwelling units where they spend a significant portion of their income on housing. The health and socioeconomic challenges Blacks face cannot be solved without fixing their rental housing and lowering the rents. Therefore, the aim is to **improve housing quality** and **lower the rents** to about 20 percent of a household's income.

We aim to solve the rental housing problem by establishing a minimum level of housing quality that all rental units must reach and sustain. The intent is to ensure that all East Side renters live in healthy, safe housing suitable for raising children. Next, we intend to lower the high rents that Blacks pay for housing. The median household income for Black Buffalo is \$32,000 yearly. Thus, a high-rent wall traps most Blacks on the East Side or similar neighborhoods. For example, the 2022 Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in the Buffalo SMSA was \$963 (and is scheduled to climb to \$1,163 in 2024). A household had to earn \$3,210 monthly or \$38,520 annually in 2022 to afford this fair market-rate apartment without paying more than 30 percent of their income for housing.

To put this figure in perspective, 56 percent of Black Buffalo households earned less than \$40,000 annually in 2022. About 80 percent made less than the median household income of whites living in Erie County (\$77,300), 68 percent made less than the median household income of Whites living in the city (\$62,900), and a staggering one-third of Black Buffalo households earned less than \$20,000 in 2022. Thus, for most Blacks, even fair market-rate housing is beyond their economic reach, forcing them to

search for housing in the **predatory East Side housing market.**



Source: Center for Urban Studies

Most Black East Siders pay more than 30 percent of their income on rent, with a significant number paying 50 percent or more. High rents **cause** evictions, produce homelessness, generate moves for better housing conditions, and spawn the constant movement from one house to another. It is a driver of housing insecurity and neighborhood instability. Given their low incomes, most Blacks are permanently trapped in this predatory housing market, where they will perpetually pay exorbitant rent for poor-quality housing.

The goal is to **de-commodify housing** so that all households will pay less rent, enabling them to spend more on other commodities, thereby raising the quality of their lives without increasing their incomes. This process requires moving housing from the private market to the public and social sectors, thus reducing the impact of land speculation and other market dynamics on rents and ensuring permanent housing affordability for residents, especially those with low incomes. This strategy requires shifting to an **alternative housing model** that stresses shared ownership and community wealth production.

3. Housing and Property Ownership and Community Wealth Building

Blacks do not own or control the land where they build their communities. This lack of ownership and control is a source of **residential instability**. **Absentee property owners** are concerned about profit-making, not community building, and this singular focus on exchange value and profit maximization is the engine that drives Black neighborhood underdevelopment.

This lack of ownership of community lands means that residents have **no control** over the land, enabling absentee property owners to operate freely, doing as they please. This lack of control over neighborhood development has to stop. Therefore, the aim is to increase housing security and protect the neighborhood from developers and speculators by increasing the residents' home and property ownership rates.



Source: Google Earth

Only about 31% of Blacks own the dwelling unit where they live. We intend to increase this ownership rate by promoting **shared ownership** of housing and other property types. The goal is to encourage residents to purchase condominiums, co-housing, and other forms of shared-equity housing while supporting individual ownership. The aim is to increase housing security by dramatically reducing housing costs. Rent control and collective ownership are two ways to achieve this task. Shared ownership is more realistic than individual ownership for low-income populations, such as Black Buffalo. It is a way to build intergenerational community wealth.

The goal is to “free the land” from **absentee ownership** and **control** so it becomes a community asset owned and controlled by the residents. We intend to prioritize **community wealth-building** by promoting shared ownership, including community land trusts, condominiums, property cooperatives, employee ownership, social enterprises, community development corporations, and developing neighborhood assets to service the entire community and help all residents gain financial security.

4. Universal Education, Skills Training, and Community Wealth Building

The **barriers** to education and opportunities causes Blacks to be **reproduced** as low-paid, unskilled, and semi-skilled workers. Blacks will remain locked in the economic basement without the education and work skills to navigate the employment and hiring system in America’s labor market.

Most Black students do not read at grade level. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a sector of the US Department of Education, in 2019, 84% of Black students lacked proficiency in reading skills, meaning they struggled to read and comprehend written text that is developmentally appropriate for their age. This reading challenge holds back their educational achievement and skills acquisition at every stage in the life cycle. Under these conditions, the Black community became a factory that perpetually **reproduces** Blacks as low-wage workers or raw material for the billion-dollar-a-year prison-industrial complex.

We aim to attack the education and skills problem in two interrelated ways. First, we intend to have every neighborhood child reading at or above their appropriate **grade level**. Reading is required to access and understand the written text, thus making possible knowledge acquisition, language skill development, critical thinking, problem-solving, cultural awareness, and the ability to earn a living and join with others to create a better world. Reading is thus the most critical skill required for people to reach their full potential in a highly developed society.

We will also develop projects and programs that make students knowledgeable of their history and deepen their understanding of the forces that seek to underdevelop their communities and keep them in a subordinate status. Reading, knowledge, and skills acquisition must be interlocked with knowledge of one’s history and the socioeconomic forces seeking to subordinate them.

Second, every able-bodied neighborhood worker, sixteen years and older, will be able to develop **the literacy and work skills** needed to earn a living and become **financially self-sufficient**. The aim is to develop innovative on-the-job training programs to develop literacy and work skills. The

reconstruction of the Black East Side will be an economy of scale. So, a training program incorporating literacy, computational, and skills development into a singular program will be created for neighborhood workers. The intent is to train them as carpenters, plumbers, electricians, roofers, landscapers, and the like so they can rebuild their lives as they rebuild their neighborhoods. Additionally, we will work with all anchor institutions and businesses located on the East Side to recruit and train workers living on the East Side.

5. Youth Development

In parts of ancient Africa, when members from different tribes met, they greeted each other by asking, “How are the children doing?” In Buffalo, **the children are not doing well**. Black youth face many challenges, including getting a quality education, graduating from high school, completing college, finding employment, earning a living wage, staying out of trouble with the police, and navigating the ever-present danger of violence.



Source: Center for Urban Studies

For example, a Black East Side resident recently told me, “My nephew said he is trying to stay out of trouble because he wants to reach his eighteenth birthday.” The resident said, “I asked him why he felt that way, and he ran off a list of friends who had been killed before reaching eighteen.” I thought, “We have to **stop the violence**. A youngster who believes he might not live to be eighteen will have a hard time imagining adulthood, acquiring a career, and living a good life. For many East Side young folk, the quest to survive has replaced the desire to thrive.”

The Black leader, Fredrick Douglass, said, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken

men.” Therefore, the goal is to **build strong children** by developing varied youth development activities, including violence prevention and youth education, recreation, leadership, and cultural and work-related activities year-round. These programs will be tied to neighborhood development and engaged in problem-solving activities connected to the Kwanzaa theme, “collective work and responsibility.”

6. Bolster the Visual Image of the Physical Neighborhood

The visual image of the *physical* East Side community is that of an unhealthy, run-down, desolate, and forgotten place. This foreboding neighborhood image reflects a dilapidated physical environment and the absence of a green infrastructure. Green infrastructure refers to a network of natural and semi-natural elements that enhance the neighborhood’s environment with trees and vegetation, pocket parks, and delightful open spaces. The existing physical image of the neighborhood is disconnected from and **hides the beauty and vibrancy of the residents’ daily lives**.



Source: the UB Center for Urban Studies

This negative physical image of East Side neighborhoods affects the resident’s mental and physical health. This forlorn neighborhood image reflects the deteriorating physical environment that exposes the residents to various health hazards, including rat and roach infestation and air and noise pollution. We aim to **reconstruct the physical environment** so it accurately reflects the beauty of East Side residents. The intent is to improve the physical image by fixing the sidewalks, curbs, and streets, beautifying vacant lots and abandoned structures, and creating a vibrant green infrastructure throughout the neighborhood. The intent is to transform the East Side into a healthy, walkable community filled with trees, shrubbery, flowers, and natural amenities that enhance its health, safety, and beauty.

7. Universal Improvement in Health Outcomes

The most pressing problem facing Black Buffalo is race-based health inequities. The life expectancy of Black Buffalo is 10 to 12 years shorter compared to that of Whites. African Americans are 300% more likely to have chronic, often preventable, diseases than whites.

The social determinants that drive these adverse health outcomes are inextricably tied to the marginalized and underdeveloped neighborhoods where Blacks live. We aim to abolish these race-based health disparities and inequities by turning the Black East Side into a neighborly community and building **a culture of health that stresses prevention**, including access to **healthy foods**, exercise, health screenings, increased access to health services, and navigating the healthcare system and providing transportation to and from doctor’s offices.

Table 1: Erie County Health Indicators by Race		
Health Indicator	White	Black
% premature deaths (<75 years)	36%	61%
Heart disease mortality per 100,000	166	209
Stroke mortality per 100,000	34	50
Diabetes mortality per 100,000	20	44
Diabetes hospitalization per 100,000	13	48
Asthma hospitalization per 10,000	3	15
% Low birthweight births (2500 grams)	7%	14%
Infant mortality per 1000 live births	5	11
Source: New York State Department of Health, County Health Indicators by Race/Ethnicity 2018-2020		

Source: UB Center for Urban Studies

Creating a food security system is central to transforming the Black East Side into a **healthy place to live**. The concept that **food is medicine** and the secret to healthy living

will drive the creation of a decentralized, collectively-owned food distribution system and uncostly transportation to and from supermarkets. We intend to bolster the residents' health literacy and provide them with health navigators and advocates. We intend to produce a generation of researchers who study health inequities on the East Side, across Western New York, and the nation to deepen our knowledge and understanding of Blacks' health challenges and how to abolish them.

COMPREHENSIVE NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING and TARGETED UNIVERSALISM

Comprehensive neighborhood planning must be used to guide East Side development. Development strategies that implement a hodgepodge of piecemeal projects that ignore **root causes** and are disconnected from a broader neighborhood vision will never turn the East Side into a neighborly community. Achieving this goal requires a comprehensive neighborhood planning strategy that forges the seven targeted focus areas into a material force that drives neighborhood transformation. Developing these seven targeted focus areas will require strengthening existing community-based organizations, block clubs, schools, health, and social institutions and developing new institutions, including non-profit housing organizations, business development incubators, and neighborhood-based cooperatives.

The neighborhood planning process aims to integrate the seven targeted development areas into a comprehensive strategy that informs and drives neighborhood transformation. The strategy is to focus on **people** and **place** while attacking the root causes of neighborhood underdevelopment. The seven targeted focus areas are classified and placed in three neighborhood development zones: **people, housing, and neighborhood.**

We will use targeted universalism to guide the development of the zones and use ongoing research to increase knowledge, understanding, and insight into the *seven targeted focus areas* and learn how to move from **problem identification to aspiration realization**. The intent is to select a **single East Side neighborhood** for the pilot study. Once proven successful, the model will be expanded to other parts of the East Side, city, and urban region.

The **people zone** will consist of four targeted focus areas: community control of the neighborhood, universal education and skills training, youth development, and abolish neighborhood health inequities. The **housing zone** will consist of two targeted focus areas: fix the actual existing rental housing and universal housing and property ownership, while the **neighborhood zone** will oversee the bolstering of the

neighborhood's visual image targeted development area.



Source: UB Center for Urban Studies

The following principles will inform and keep the comprehensive neighborhood planning development process on track:

Resident leadership and engagement: The people actually living in the neighborhood will lead the planning and development process and be engaged in all aspects of the neighborhood's growth and development. The residents will oversee and guide the work of the professional planning and implementation team.

Neighborhood Vision: the neighborhood vision is an aspirational description of the type of community the residents seek to build. It is based on the community's values, beliefs, and attitudes and will guide the neighborhood planning and development process. The residents will collectively create their neighborhood vision.

Community Organizing: The neighborhood is conceptualized as a social organization. From the onset, full-time professional organizers must be part of the planning and development team. Their task is to promote solidarity, build trust among the residents, and forge interactive links between community leaders, residents and planners and neighborhood developers.

Collaboration and Partnerships: The radical transformation of the demonstration project neighborhood involves the development of seven targeted development areas. No single neighborhood can effectively address all these aspects alone. Thus, there is a need to bring together multiple partners from across the urban metropolis to collaborate on the planning and development of the demonstration project neighborhood.

Targeted Universalism: Neighborhood residents differ in income, housing tenure, educational attainment, health status, employment, income, and gender and face different challenges. Because of these differences, they face different challenges. For example, homeowners face challenges that differ from renters. Residents earning less than \$20,000 annually encounter problems that differ from Blacks making \$50,000 or more. The Black worker without a high school diploma faces challenges that differ from Blacks with some college but no degree. The targeted universalism principle recognizes that people have different starting points and face different barriers and thus require different levels of resources and varying types of

support and assistance to grow and develop.

Regulate market dynamics: In urban neighborhoods, the unregulated market will increase rents, housing, and property values, eventually pushing out the lower-income residents. Therefore, a regulatory system must be developed to control market dynamics.

Planning and Implementation as a Simultaneous Process: Simultaneous planning and implementation enable communities to be flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances and take advantage of emerging opportunities. It also allows the residents to view tangible progress, demonstrating the planning team's commitment to action and change.

Connect On-the-Job Training to Neighborhood Reconstruction: Reconstruction of an underdeveloped neighborhood will produce an economy of scale that creates jobs and business opportunities. The aim is to use the rebuilding process to train residents as carpenters, electricians, plumbers, roofers, landscapers, and other work aligned with the neighborhood development process.

Collectivism: Low-to-moderate income can only grow and develop by having residents pool their resources and leverage their collective strength to address common challenges and make investments that benefit the entire community. In these communities, the individual is only as strong as the collective. Thus, collectivism is the secret to developing a community culture based on planning and working together.

ORGANIZATIONAL and MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

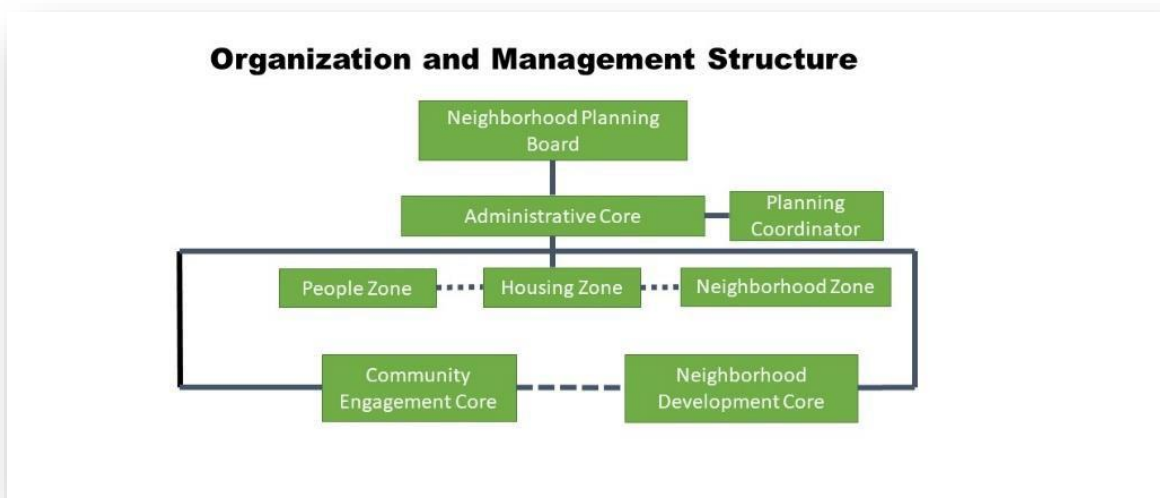
The aim is to establish a democratic organization and management framework to guide the planning and development of the neighborhood selected for the demonstration project. Neighborhoods have to be **highly organized and democratically** run to overcome the barriers to development. The intent is to create a structure that enables the residents to lead the planning and development project and to provide structured input and leadership in all phases of the planning and development process.

A **neighborhood planning board** will be established to provide overall leadership and guidance for the project, including approval of the hiring of all consultants and team members, including fiduciary responsibility. The planning board will consist of the representatives of the lead organization, residents, and stakeholders. The majority of the members will be neighborhood residents.

An **administrative core** consisting of the project director, coordinators of the People, Housing, and Neighborhood zones, and coordinators of the community engagement and neighborhood development cores will oversee the neighborhood planning and development process. This team will provide the day-to-day leadership of the neighborhood planning and development process.

The **People zone** will consist of targeted focus areas in community control of the neighborhood, universal education and skills training, youth development, and abolishing neighborhood health inequities. Four working groups will be established to plan and develop these four targeted focus areas.

The **Housing zone** will consist of two targeted focus areas: fix the actual existing rental housing and universal housing and property ownership. Working groups will be established to plan and develop these two focus areas. Likewise, the **Neighborhood zone** will oversee the bolstering of the neighborhood’s visual image targeted development zone, and a working group will be established to plan and develop these areas.



Source: UB Center for Urban Studies

SELECTING THE DEMONSTRATION PROJECT NEIGHBORHOOD

The demonstration neighborhood project will focus on initiating a project in a single neighborhood to show how to transform an underdeveloped neighborhood into a neighborly community. If the plan succeeds, it must be applied to multiple neighborhoods in Buffalo. Selecting a neighborhood for the demonstration project will not be easy. The East Side is not a homogenous community. Instead, the neighborhoods vary in social, economic, and physical conditions. Although every neighborhood experiences some degree of underdevelopment, the challenges in some communities are more significant than others. The Center for Urban Studies developed a weighted **Hardship Index** (HI) based on eight indicators from the American Community Survey to assist in selecting the demonstration project neighborhood.

These variables are:

- 1. Share of persons 25 and older without a high school diploma**
- 2. Unemployment rate of persons 16 and older**

3. Median household income
4. Share of households that are homeowners
5. Share of the population not in the labor force
6. Median value of owner-occupied housing
7. Share of household paying 40 percent or more of their income on housing
8. Poverty rate

HARDSHIP INDEX

The Hardship Index ranges from 0 to 100. The higher the HI, the greater the level of neighborhood hardship, and the lower the index, the less the neighborhood hardship. Using this index, 0-25 is *no hardship*, 26 – 50 is *hardship*, 51-75 is *severe hardship*, and 76-100 is *extreme hardship* (Map 2). The demonstration project neighborhood should range from severe to extreme hardship. Additionally, the demonstration project neighborhood should have a well-established community-based organization to house the initiative and help build interactive connections between the project team and the community. Finally, because **gentrification** increasingly threatens the East Side, the demonstration project neighborhood should be proximate to a gentrification danger zone to serve as a buffer to protect other East Side neighborhoods from this threat.

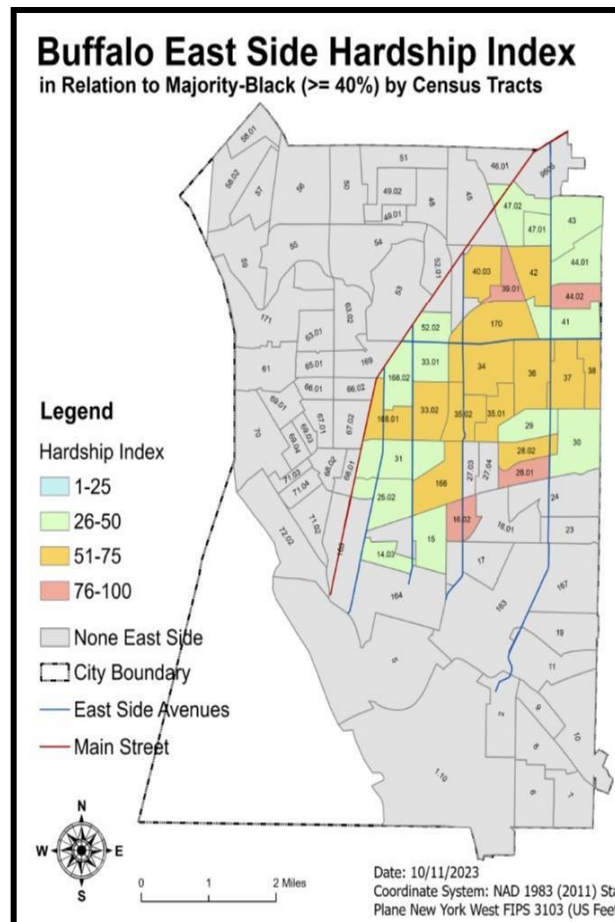
TIMETABLE

This project is a long-term one that will be implemented over several years. The aim is to demonstrate that a project based on comprehensive planning, simultaneous community organizing, neighborhood planning and implementation, and attacking root causes will transform an underdeveloped neighborhood into a *neighborly community*. The five-year plan provides a framework for the work that will occur each year.

Year One: Establish a Neighborhood Governance System. Establishing working groups, community organizing, and building partnerships with organizations and groups across the city. Hold focus groups, organize resident tours of the neighborhood, and initiate research and planning in each of the three Development Zones. A formative evaluation will be used to assess the first-year activities.

- **Year Two:** Project Implementation commences based on available opportunities, and research and neighborhood planning continue. Work with the City to strengthen neighborhood building codes and develop unique code enforcement zones. Develop partnerships with housing organizations and establish a community land trust. Fundraising activities initiated. Initial plans for education, youth development, and health equities will also be launched. A formative evaluation will be used to assess the second-year activities.

- **Year Three:** The planning phase ends, and implementation takes center stage in the development process. Performance is measured against the indicators established during the planning phase. Partnership building and fundraising intensify. A formative evaluation will be used to assess the third-year activities.
- **Year Four:** Community Fair held to evaluate the planning and development initiative and review and establish new priorities if necessary. Implementation is accelerated. A formative evaluation will be used to assess the fourth-year activities.
- **Year Five:** A summative evaluation will be held after the initiative's first five years are assessed, and the next five-year plan will be formulated based on the accomplishments and shortcomings of the initiative.



Source: US Census & UB Center for Urban Studies

CONCLUSION

We will **change** the Black East Side by developing a **new model of neighborhood development** based on community control, income inclusivity, collective living, communal ownership, and the building of community wealth. **Constructing** this new model requires **fixing the actually existing neighborhoods**

where Black folks live. **Neighborhoods matter** because they positively or negatively *affect their residents' life chances*. They determine people's access to residential stability, uncostly quality housing, good education, health services, supermarkets, social services, employment opportunities, and limited exposure to pollution and other environmental toxins.

The bottom line is that neighborhoods are potent predictors of a person's life chances due to the socioeconomic, educational, environmental, and healthcare factors found there. Folks living in developed neighborhoods with amenities, suitable housing, excellent schools, and access to quality services and opportunities will live longer and have better socioeconomic outcomes than people in marginalized and underdeveloped neighborhoods.

The good news is that underdeveloped neighborhoods are not **natural places**, immutable and fixed in time and space. Instead, they are social constructions created by a racist, profit-making approach to city-building. Thus, if private and public sector partners can intentionally build underdeveloped neighborhoods, progressive forces can intentionally build another, very different, and better neighborhood—**a neighborly place that people can call home**.

We must develop a **new neighborhood paradigm** to achieve this goal. The White middle-class neighborhood model cannot be used to build equitable neighborhoods where Blacks thrive and reach their full human potential. Neighborhood models that use **exclusion** to bolster property values and maximize profits will always keep out low-income residents.

Therefore, we propose a new neighborhood model based on **community governance, income inclusivity, class integration, and community wealth accumulation**. This approach to neighborhood development is our best hope of building a society where all residents reach their full human potential and live a good life.

We call for establishing **a neighborhood demonstration project** to show how to transform the Black East Side into a neighborly community. The intent is to select one East Side neighborhood for the pilot project. After perfecting this neighborhood development model, we will expand it to other neighborhoods across the East Side and undeveloped communities throughout Buffalo and Erie County.

Lastly, I want to stress that the **neighborly community** is not a **separate but equal** residential strategy. In contrast, it is a replacement for the White neighborhood model and a declaration that **everyone has the**

right to live in healthy neighborhoods that support their mental, social, and physical wellbeing.

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Glossary of Terms

Underdeveloped neighborhood refers to Black and racialized communities of color that systemic racism, public policies, and private practices marginalize to accumulate wealth made possible by their limited housing options. These policies and practices cause poor housing, inadequate schools, low-capacity institutions, decaying infrastructure, and other conditions in these communities.

Predatory housing market refers to housing markets in underdeveloped neighborhoods where residents are charged excessive rents for substandard, poorly maintained housing.

Uncostly housing refers to quality housing within the income reach of all residents in a community, including the lowest-income individuals and families. We use this term instead of affordable housing because that concept has become a wastebasket term. It is deliberately vague and hides the reality that most houses designated as affordable are NOT within the income reach of most residents living in underdeveloped communities.

Regulating market Dynamics refers to the perpetual quest of real estate and land development markets to catalyze continuous increases in property values, housing prices, and rentals, making neighborhoods too costly for low-income populations and groups. About 34% of Black Buffalo make under \$20,000 annually, and 56% make under \$40,000 and cannot afford to live in an apartment that costs \$900 a month without paying more than 30 percent of their income. Thus, without regulation, the market will increase rents and housing values as the neighborhood develops, pushing out lower-income residents.

Community Control of Neighborhoods is a governance structure where residents have significant decision-making power over their neighborhood, especially land use, housing, planning, and community development. In these communities, governance is transparent, leaders are accountable, and residents actively participate in decision-making, planning, and development activities.

Root causes are the fundamental factors or conditions that give rise to the problem or series of problems that challenge a neighborhood. These root causes are often situated deep within systems and are not immediately apparent. The overall conditions in the neighborhood will persist, becoming increasingly complex, until the root causes are abolished.

Community wealth accumulation refers to the ability of locals to own and control the neighborhood economy and community-based assets and use these community resources to reduce disparities and improve residents' mental, social, and physical wellbeing. It stresses building cooperatives, worker-owned businesses, and various forms of shared-equity housing, including condominiums and co-housing. The aim is to create neighborhood financial prosperity and bolster all residents' quality of life and standard of living.

Collective living refers to neighborhood residents pooling resources to achieve economic and social goals based on cooperation, mutual support, reciprocity, collective decision-making, and community solidarity. It promotes a culture of shared responsibility, social cohesion, pride, and belonging.

Targeted Universalism is a concept and strategy used to operationalize equity by addressing systemic inequalities and disparities. It sets universal goals and policies while recognizing that neighborhood residents have different starting points, challenges, and issues. Therefore, targeted strategies are developed to address the unique needs and circumstances of various individuals and groups in the neighborhood.